

Random Encounters

III Met on the River of Dreams

By Skip Williams



The Grove of Shrieking Idols

Some distance downstream from the yrthaks and the whirlpool, the river widens out and becomes fairly shallow and slow. The river bottom and its banks become soft and muddy here. Great trees grow from the banks and their branches reach for considerable length over the water. The river has changed course along the stretch several times in the past few centuries, and the party encounters many big trees rising straight out of the river. These partly submerged trees are long dead, and the jagged remains of their broken limbs pose a hazard both above and below the water to people in boats. The river's sluggish current here, however, make avoiding these obstacles fairly simple.



Many years ago, a tribe of lizardfolk, now long gone, carved many of the drowned trees into bizarre totem poles to honor their god (Semuanya), and simply to express themselves artistically. Anyone traveling down the river will find dozens of these idols scattered about. They usually stand alone or in groups of two or three.

One area, however, contains dozens of these idols, some carved from giant trees more than 12 feet in girth. A pair of water nagas and their scrag servants calls this area home. They gleefully waylay any travelers that happen by.

Acting under the nagas' direction, the scrags have hollowed out several of the larger idols, creating hidden chambers within that are about 5 feet wide and twice that high. Each chamber has a submerged entrance and is well peppered with spyholes. The eyes and mouths of the faces in each totem pole serve handsomely as arrow slits for any creature inside the hidden chamber.

When strangers approach, the scrags submerge and the nagas take up positions in the hollow idols. When the newcomers are well within the grove, one naga, Postu, uses *ventriloquism* to make a nearby idol (not a hollow one) "speak." The idol emits a screeching wail and accuses the interlopers of intruding in a sacred grove. It demands tribute from the trespassers.

The nagas aren't particularly greedy and merely demand a magic item for every two people in the group, plus 100 gp in gold, gems, or jewels, for each person in the party. If payment is not forthcoming, the nagas attack. The second naga, Litonnui, casts *haste* on herself and the scrags, while Postu uses *suggestion* on a fighter type. The suggestion could be fairly benign (pay the toll by dropping a magic weapon or shield into the water) or deadly (pay the toll by swimming to the bottom of the river and staying there).

Once they receive their *haste* spells, the scrags send one of their number directly at the party while the other two try to maneuver around the flanks. The scrags prefer lightly armored targets that might prove most vulnerable to their rend attacks.

In later rounds of combat, Postu continues casting spells from inside his idol while Litonnui casts *displacement* and *mage armor* on herself and goes to join the scrags in the fight. Once in melee, Litonnui uses *chill touch* to strengthen her melee attacks. Postu may use *summon monster II* to distract the party while Litonnui casts spells.

When making her own melee attacks, Litonnui concentrates on foes the scrags seem unable to hit. If she herself has difficulty attacking, she may drop back and use her *Melf's acid arrow* spells.

In any fight, the nagas can use their *mage hand* spells to help them make use of their potions, if they feel the need to consume them.

Scrags (3): hp 63 each, see *Monster Manual*, page 247.

Postu: Male water naga; CR 7; Large aberration (aquatic); HD 7d8+21; hp 52; Init +1; Spd 30 ft., swim 50 ft.; AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +5; Grp +11; Atk +6 melee (2d6+3, bite); Full Atk +6 melee (2d6+3, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA poison, spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft.; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +8; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 17, Cha 17.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +8, Concentration +9, Diplomacy +5, Hide -3, Intimidate +5, Listen +8, Spellcraft +7, Spot +9, Swim +11; Alertness, Combat Casting, Eschew Materials, Lightning Reflexes.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 16, initial and secondary damage 1d8 Con. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Spells: Postu casts spells as a 7th-level sorcerer.

Sorcerer Spells Known (6/7/7/5; save DC 13 + spell level): 0 -- *dancing lights, daze, detect magic, ghost sound, mage hand, open/close, resistance*; 1st -- *magic missile, message, ray of enfeeblement, shield, ventriloquism*; 2nd -- *detect thoughts, see invisibility, summon monster II*; 3rd -- *protection from energy, summon monster III*.

Possessions: +1 ring of protection, potion of cure light wounds, potion of climbing.

Litonnui: Female water naga ; CR 7; Large aberration (aquatic); HD 7d8+21; hp 52; Init +2; Spd 30 ft., swim 50 ft.; AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +5; Grp +13; Atk +8 melee (2d6+6, bite); Full Atk +8 melee (2d6+6, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA poison, spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft.; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +7; Str 18, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 15.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +12, Hide -2, Listen +7, Spellcraft +5, Spot +7, Swim +12; Alertness, Combat Casting, Eschew Materials, Lightning Reflexes.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 16, initial and secondary damage 1d8 Con. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Spells: Litonnui casts spells as a 7th-level sorcerer.

Sorcerer Spells Known (6/7/7/4; save DC 12 + spell level): 0 -- *dancing lights, daze, detect magic, ghost sound, mage hand, open/close, resistance*; 1st -- *chill touch, expeditious retreat, mage armor, shield, sleep*; 2nd -- *blindness/deafness, levitate, Melf's acid arrow*; 3rd -- *displacement, haste*.

Possessions: 2 potions of cure light wounds, potion of magic fang.

In addition to their personal possessions, Postu and Litonnui have accumulated a level 11 treasure (mostly in the form of gold and gems they have taken as tolls from travelers). They keep this wealth well buried in the muddy river bottom near (but not inside) one of the hollow idols. The easier way to locate this loot is to question a captured scrag or naga. A party also could locate it by diligently dragging or probing the bottom of the grove, but the search proves tedious and takes several days.

Bringing the Parts Together

If the party falls afoul of the yrthaks in part one, the nagas might notice the activity and be ready for the party when the characters arrive in the grove. If so, Litonnui is fully powered up with *mage armor, shield*, and *displacement*.

If the party pays the nagas' toll, the nagas are inclined to be somewhat helpful and can warn the party about the salamanders and the yuan-ti down the river.

The nagas delight in baiting the highly territorial salamanders, and they occasionally traverse the salamanders' area (thanks largely to their superior swim speeds and to Postu's *protection from energy* spells).

Coming in Part 3 of III Met on the River of Dreams

Take your chances on the rapids of the River of Dreams.

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